
EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Defense Logistics Information Service Teaches North Atlantic Treaty Organization Codification in Eastern Europe

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Introduction

The Defense Logistics Information Service (DLIS) is helping countries in Eastern Europe achieve their goal of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership by teaching them the fundamentals of the NATO Codification System (NCS). Since 1999, DLIS has conducted seven seminars about the NCS and the Federal Catalog System (FCS) in countries that were formerly members of the Warsaw Pact. The seminars have helped those countries understand and integrate into the NATO system of logistics. The trips have also provided a fascinating look at the people and cultures of those countries for the DLIS staff members who participated in them, and have helped establish relationships between DLIS and the countries' National Codification Bureaus (NCBs) that will promote cooperation for many years to come. Except for the Poland seminar, all of these events were sponsored by the mil-to-mil teams located in the countries. The mil-to-mil offices were set up to build defense cooperation between the United States and the former members of the Warsaw Pact and the former Soviet republics. The Office of Defense Cooperation at the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw sponsored the event in Poland. Other events DLIS has participated and conducted seminars to include:

- 1999 Poland;
- 2000 Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Romania;
- 2001 Latvia;
- 2002 Lithuania;
- 2003 Czech Republic;

What are DLIS and the Nato Codification System?

Located in Battle Creek, Michigan, DLIS is part of the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA). The primary mission at DLIS is to manage the Federal Catalog System (FCS) for the armed forces and federal civilian agencies. All military supplies and equipment, from nuts and bolts to fighter jets and submarines, are listed in this catalog. It plays a vital role as the common frame of reference that enables Department of Defense buyers to communicate with the nation's military suppliers. The catalog lists nearly seven million active items and provides more than one hundred different pieces of information on each item. The information is standardized across all military services to provide maximum interoperability. Other important missions at DLIS include managing the Central Contractor Registration System. All companies that want to do business with the federal government are required to register there. They also manage the Military Engineering Data Asset Locator System. This is an automated information system that serves as the central index of technical data for the Defense Department.

Because of the FCS mission, DLIS serves as the U.S. National Codification Bureau (NCB) and the point of contact for all matters related to the NATO Codification System. The system is based on the FCS and provides for interoperability among NATO members and other allies. It enhances the effectiveness of logistics support by assisting in the logistics data exchange among the NATO countries and other users of the NCS. The system has been adopted by all signatories of the alliance for use in identifying equipment and supplies. Its use is prescribed under two NATO Standardization Agreements:

- Uniform System of Supply Classification STANAG 3150
- Uniform System of Item Identification STANAG 3151

The system is governed by the NATO Group of National Directors on Codification (AC/135) and implemented through each country's NCB. Ironically, the NCS is used by more non-NATO countries than NATO countries and serves as the worldwide standard for military item identification.

The information provided in those identifications helps users do their jobs from acquisition through disposal. Among other things, these numbers tell users who manages items, where they can be purchased, how much they cost, whether they are repairable, their shelf life, whether they contain hazardous materials, and how they should be disposed of when they are no longer needed. They promote interoperability among countries and prevent waste and duplication by ensuring that every item the United States and its allies use has only one stock number. Such numbers are the vital link that ties together the supply system.

How are the Seminars Conducted?

For most of these seminars, DLIS has sent a team of two or three people. As DLIS's manager of international policies and procedures, I have participated in each of the events, but the other team members have rotated. The members have included Jake Beyer, Chris Yoder, Dennis Shipe, Kathy Dillon, John Zellers, and Celia Torres. All of the team members have a strong knowledge and experience of the NCS or the systems that support it.

Although the seminars have followed the same basic format, there have been differences depending on the goals and each country's previous knowledge of the NCS. For example, when we visited Poland in 1999, the people knew they would soon be invited to join NATO; so they needed to get a very detailed knowledge of the NCS in a short time. Their NCB staff already had some knowledge of the NCS, so we spent several days with them answering questions and conducting a sophisticated dialogue in addition to the standard presentations. The DLIS team also gave an overview presentation at the Polish military academy for logistics. In Macedonia, on the other hand, the country was unfamiliar with the NCS and needed to start from scratch. The audience size for these seminars has varied from about twelve in Latvia to more than seventy in Czech Republic and Macedonia.

Yet another situation existed in the Czech Republic during our February 2003 visit. There, the country had already implemented an NCS-compliant cataloging system. However, they still had many questions about different aspects of the NCS. Also, although the NCB staff in the Czech Republic has become very knowledgeable about the NCS, they still needed to educate their user community. As a result, the audience there consisted of a broad range of military and civilian people from all of their services and all areas of logistics and acquisition. The Czech Republic NCB staff believed they would have better success selling the benefits of the NCS if the words came from the United States or another NATO country that has used the system for a long time and could vouch for its functionality and benefits.

"During our visit to the Czech Republic, members of their NCB set aside time to discuss detailed, specific questions about NATO codification policy and processes," Team member Dennis Shipe said. "It was remarkable to see how quickly they had adopted the NATO Codification System, and are now working through the routine questions and issues that are dealt

with by all NATO countries. It is quite refreshing to hear the thoughts and ideas about the NCS from someone just recently exposed to it and striving to learn all they can.”

What are the Benefits?

Our teams know from the feedback they received from each event that the seminars have been very useful to the countries. Participant surveys are taken at all military-to-military events, and we have received high marks at each place we have visited. In Macedonia, the military-to-military staff reported that DLIS received the highest rating of any team that had come there, not bad considering that most military-to-military offices host dozens of events per year. Additionally, all of the events have led to closer cooperation after they ended. At all the events, we have been impressed by the dedication and interest of the countries.

“I was most impressed by the sense of determination on the part of the military,” Mr. Schmoll said of his participation in the Lithuania seminar. “The people we met seemed focused on elevating the status of their country by joining NATO. I had the sense I was working with patriots.”

Dennis Shipe, who has participated in seminars in Bulgaria, Latvia, and the Czech Republic, was equally impressed. “It is truly amazing to have the opportunity to visit countries that, as I was growing up, were considered our enemy,” he said. “To meet the people reveals just how much we have in common. The people in the countries I have visited were proud to show us how far they have come since the fall of the Soviet Union, yet they were very eager to learn as much as they could from us in the short time that we were there. They were passionate in sharing with us their history and culture and embraced us as if we were lifelong friends.”

Although the teams have helped these countries to build NCS compliant systems, members also believe they benefited. The experiences I have had in these countries left me with memories that will last a lifetime, and I have seen things that very few people ever get to see. I am also a big believer in the value of the human side of these events. The friendships I have made on these trips have helped me deal with these countries much more positively. Despite how easy electronic communication has become, you just cannot build the solid relationships with people that you can during face-to-face meetings. Without personal visits, I do not think I could have ever gained as detailed an understanding of each country’s needs. The fact that I have developed these friendships has also made my work with these countries much more rewarding.

What are the Cultural Experiences?

Participants in these events must be prepared for the cultural differences. Seminars normally include a day of sightseeing, sometimes more when they last more than a week and there is a weekend available. We have found in all cases that the countries we visit are very proud of their cultures and are anxious to show them off. The cultural visits have also helped give us insight into the kind of people we are dealing with.

Some of the cultural experiences in particular stand out, such as the tour of the Rila Monastery that Dennis Shipe and I took in Bulgaria. The monastery is decorated with a great number of murals depicting scenes from the Bible, in an eerie and picturesque mountain setting, one of the most remarkable things the author has ever seen. Another notable experience was the visit to Ceausescu’s Palace in Romania. Built almost entirely of marble by the last Communist dictator of Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu, the tour guide told us that the materials alone cost \$3 billion. It is said to be the second largest building in the world, topped only by the Pentagon, and contains things such as tapestries the size of a football field.

The Future

A DLIS team will return to Poland to conduct an advanced seminar and consultation in October 2003. The Croatia and Slovak Republic NCBs hope to arrange for a seminar during the next year, and DLIS expects other countries to request new or follow-up visits as well. In any

case, DLIS expects its cooperation throughout Eastern Europe to grow as seven new countries join NATO in 2004.

If you would like to learn more about DLIS, go to the DLIS web at <http://www.dlis.dla.mil>. To learn more about the NATO Codification System, go to <http://www.nato.int/structur/AC/135/welcome.htm>. For a complete list of countries that use the NCS, go to <http://www.dlis.dla.mil/nato/sponsorship.asp>.

[Editor's note: For additional information see the DLIS CD-ROM article starting on the next page in the *DISAM Journal*.]

About the Author

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